

The American Media's Construction of "Participants" in Cases of Police Killings

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With several highly publicized police killings in the latter half of 2014, the issue of police brutality has been reignited in the United States, as emotionally charged a topic as ever, dividing Americans politically and socially and racially. This pilot study analyzes how the American media's language contributes to readers'/hearers' perception of the identities and roles of those who are victim to and those who enact police brutality. Using a sample of twenty-eight reports of the cases of Eric Garner, John Crawford III, Michael Brown, Levar Jones, and Tamir Rice from the Associated Press, National Public Radio, and The Washington Post, I coded for patterns of race-related modifiers and of passivization. Based on the analysis of these articles, I suggest the implications of such use—how race-related descriptors can influence the perception of "participants" (the involved police officers and the involved citizens) identity in relation to one another, in relation to the event, and in relation to outsiders and how passivization can influence the perception of participants' roles, implicitly connoting importance, accountability, empowerment, and other such senses.

Key words: media, police, race, passivization